



## *HOW DO YOU ENHANCE YOUR UPWARD COMMUNICATION PROCESS?*

Companies are constantly reviewing their communications process to enhance their impact on the workforce.

Generally a lot of effort is made by companies in developing communication plans, preparing presentations/memos and carefully selecting words and messages, attending team and individual team meetings, and seeking employee's opinions through conversation or opinion surveys.

These are all helpful but communications can be completed in a simple format. The key is to encourage the employees to communicate with you directly on matters that interest them most. One to ones can be intimidating; employee surveys can be too impersonal and lead to high expectations. Company presentations can be too lofty and not relevant to the person on the coal face.

To improve your upward communications you need to be able to listen, and indicate you have heard the message and that you plan to respond, by a) taking an action as requested or b) explaining your reasons why you are taking an alternative approach.

So what can you do that will practically improve this?

One medium sized Irish owned company with it's headquarters on the Southside of Dublin did take some approaches to dealing with this situation.

They developed a "no agenda skip level communication meeting" and called it a "coffee session" whereby a meeting attended by 10 randomly selected employees from one department was arranged. The meeting was attended by their manager's manager and a member of HR who facilitated the process. The meeting lasted 45 minutes and had no agenda and employees were invited to discuss items that were on their minds. Managers were open and non defensive.

Employees could ask a question, make a constructive comment or make a complaint about any area of the business, or give a compliment.

The manager listened and demonstrated actively listening. All items were recorded and the managers answered any questions they knew the answers to, took actions items to investigate suggestions or complaints. All minutes and action items were circulated to all employees.

The meetings took place every two weeks with a new selection of employees and outputs to the meetings were also communicated. This showed that the employee could get their message across in an informal environment.

The result was that upward communication was effective and seen to be working and complimented all other communication activities. It emphasised how in this company the management team wanted to communicate with, and not to, its employees. Managers knew what was on the minds of employees, including the good the bad and the ugly. They did not have to assume. Employees had a recognisable format for communicating their views to the management team.